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Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia

Asymmetric Threats and Islamist Extremists

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Introduction

Saudi Arabia still faces significant uncertainties regarding potential external threats from Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. Since May 2003, however, it has been all too clear that its primary security threats now come from terrorism, and specifically from a movement and cells affiliated with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.

Terrorism is not new to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has been the target of sporadic terrorist activity since the 1960s, when Gamal Abdul Nasser made repeated attempts to create groups that could overthrow the Saudi government, and to subvert the Saudi military.

Saudi Arabia had a major clash with radical Islamists on November 20, 1979, when Sunni militants seized control of the Grand Mosque in Makkah, one of the holiest sites in Islam. The Saudi military, along with the special counter-terrorism forces of an allied country, regained control of the mosque several weeks later. More than 200 troops and militants were killed, and 60 militants were subsequently executed.¹ Saudi Arabia also experienced Shi'ite riots in the Eastern Province, and some sporadic incidents and petty sabotage.

Saudi Arabia only began to experience serious internal security problems, however, when Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda actively turned against the monarchy in the mid-1990s and began to launch terrorist attacks in an effort to destroy it. The Kingdom was the first target of al-Qaeda when, in November 1995 the U.S.-operated National Guard Training Center in Riyadh was attacked, killing five Americans. This subsequently led to the arrest and execution of four men, purportedly inspired by Osama bin Laden.

These attacks remained sporadic, however, until May 2003, when cells affiliated with al Qaeda began an active terror campaign directed both at foreigners, especially Americans, and the regime. Until that time, the security services had only had to deal with isolated incidents for more than two decades, and could rely largely on cooption and limited measures by individual service. Al Qaeda fundamentally changed both the level of the threat and the way in which the Kingdom's security forces had to respond.

Origins & Nature of the Threat

The al-Qaeda organization evolved from a network of Arab mujahidin who had gone to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight against the Soviet occupation under the banner of Islam. The *Makhtab al Khadimat* [Office of Order] (MAK), commonly known as the Afghan Bureau, trained and recruited non-Afghani Muslims in the war against the Soviets. The MAK was co-founded by Osama bin Laden and Palestinian militant, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam between 1982-1984. The MAK's primary function was to channel funds from various sources including charities in the Middle East and North America. The money was used largely to fund training facilities for Islamic militants, many of who were senior operatives, in Afghanistan (later, funds were used to fund operations in places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, the Philippines and Indonesia).

¹ "Saudi Arabia, A Chronology of the Country's History and Key Events in US-Saudi Relationship," www.pbs.org

Osama bin Laden was born in 1957, and was the son of a wealthy Yemeni father and a Syrian mother. Bin Laden first became active in Pakistan, helping to finance the mujahidin and establish the MAK. He later went to Afghanistan to directly participate in the Afghan jihad. Bin Laden operated in an environment where Islamist extremists expelled from Egypt and other countries began to play a major role in the fighting in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's leader, General Zia, used his intelligence service, the ISI, to actively support Pashtun Islamic extremists that Pakistan felt would be loyal to Pakistan, and act as a buffer against Afghanistani freedom fighters from other factions like the Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Heraza. While Saudi money was used to fund some of the religious training schools and other facilities that helped indoctrinate young Saudi men in violent religious extremism and terrorism, it is important to note that it was Pakistan that created most of the movement and that the schools and training centers were largely neo-Salafi and not Saudi Ahab in character.

Organizing al-Qaeda

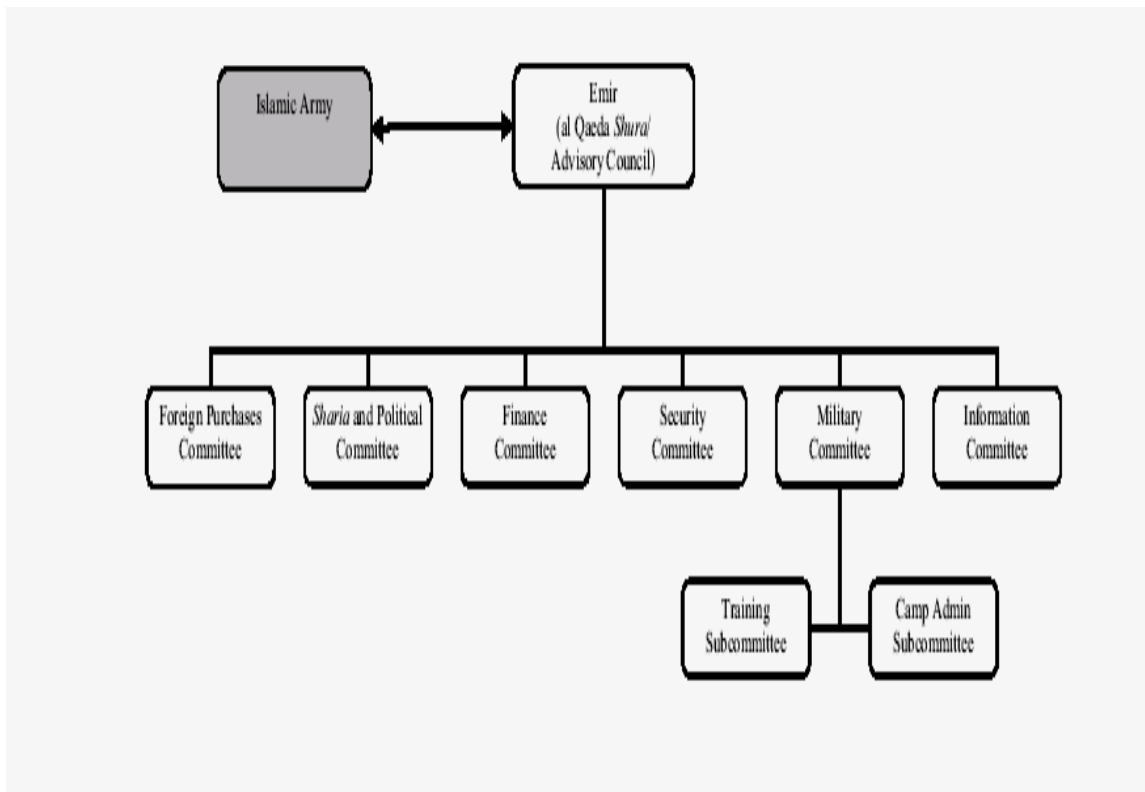
Although negotiations for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan began in 1982, withdrawal did not formally begin until February 1989. Near the end of the Soviet occupation, some mujahidin began to extend their activities to include Islamist causes worldwide and a variety of organizations with convergent interests were established to further these aims.

Osama bin Laden established Al-Qaeda, as one of these organizations circa 1988. Bin Laden sought to expand the conflict to include non-military terrorist activities in other regions. Azzam, however, wanted to stay the course, choosing instead to concentrate on military operations. After Azzam's assassination in a car bomb explosion in 1989, MAK split, with a considerable number joining bin Laden's organization.

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia, but fled in 1991 to Sudan after being detained in Jeddah and banned from travel for arms smuggling. In Sudan, bin Laden also began financing terrorist training facilities.

In Sudan, bin Laden built upon the organization he founded in Afghanistan. The organization had its own "membership roster" and committee structure to supervise procedures such as terrorist training, recommending targets, financing operations and issuing decrees, ostensibly justified by Islamic law.

Figure 1
The Organization of Al Qaeda



Al Qaeda's structure included:

- The *Shura* (Advisory Council), a close circle of bin Laden's associates; a *Shari'a* and Political committee in charge of issuing *fatwas*.
- The *Military Committee* responsible for recommending targets and supporting operations.
- The *Finance Committee* responsible for fundraising and budgetary provisions for the training camps; a *Foreign Purchases Committee* responsible for weapons and explosives acquisitions, as well as technical equipment.
- The *Security Committee* in charge of protection, intelligence- gathering and counterintelligence.
- The *Information Committee* responsible for generating and disseminating propaganda.

The organization underwent a fundamental transformation after the 2001-02 U.S.-led war destroyed al-Qaeda's headquarters in Afghanistan. It changed from a *quasi*- command-and control structure under bin Laden to a more loosely-configured network based upon individual cells dispersed throughout the world, utilizing technology and affiliated groups to achieve its aims. Al-Qaeda is now more of a "movement" and an "idea" than it is an

established organization, “in that its supporters now plan attacks independently of any centralized organization.”²

The al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula

Bin Laden had always made overthrowing the Saudi monarchy, and dividing Saudi Arabia from the West and internal reform, one of his major goals. The global anger at his attacks on 9/11, and the subsequent American invasion of Afghanistan, helped lead al-Qaeda to shift its focus back against Saudi Arabia.

An organization that called itself the *al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula* began setting up an infrastructure that included safe houses, ammunitions depots, cells and support networks. This organization was able to create a substantial structure while the Saudi government focuses on the outside threat and backlash from the events of 9/11, and concentrated on bringing weapons and explosives through Yemen thus strengthening its presence in the Kingdom.

Initial Organization and Structure

At the beginning, Yusef al-Ayeri was the chief of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and reported directly to bin Laden (al-Ayeri’s was the only regional al-Qaeda operation to report directly to OBL). Al-Ayeri’s lieutenants, in turn, reported directly to him. They were responsible for setting up five autonomous cells focusing exclusively on operations within Saudi Arabia. Since all terrorists’ activities, in the Kingdom, are derived from these cells, it was imperative for the Saudis to infiltrate and destroy them.

The first cell was the largest and strongest, and was responsible for the May 2003 attacks that announced the fact that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had become a major threat. It was headed by Turki al-Dandani. Most of al-Qaeda’s resources were allocated to this cell, allowing individuals to set up independent networks making them autonomous from one another.

The second cell was headed by Ali Abd-al Rahman al-Fagasi al-Ghamdi (a.k.a. Abu Bakr al-Azdi), considered to be the mastermind behind the May 12 attacks in Riyadh. Khaled al-Hajj, who was in charge of the third cell, was a Yemeni national and thought by some to be the “real chief” of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. Abdulazziz al-Muqrin, leader of the fourth cell, was largely responsible for organizing the November 2003 bombings.

After the infiltration of the first cell, one by one, the other cells were compromised and consequently destroyed. Members, including the key leadership, were forced to take refuge in a fifth cell. Although the fifth cell was never fully established, by default, it became the most prolific cell in Saudi Arabia, responsible for most major attacks throughout 2004—including the December 29 attack targeting the Interior Ministry and security recruitment center.

Even in Afghanistan, there were disagreements among the leadership regarding the timing and potential targets of attack. Al-Ayeri maintained that al-Qaeda members were not yet ready and lacked the time, resources and necessary supply routes from Yemen.

² “In al-Qaeda’s Sights,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 11, 2003, www.cfr.org/background/saudi_terror.php; “Al-Qaeda,” Wikipedia, www.en.wikipedia.org

Furthermore, recruitment proved to be more difficult than expected. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian surgeon who is the theological advisor and likely successor to bin Laden, dismissed these objections arguing that the time was right for operations to begin. Zawahiri made the case that attacking soft targets and Americans (who would flee the Kingdom) would paralyze and consequently topple the Saudi government. This position won out against the standard al-Qaeda approach of patience, building support networks and launching a spectacular attack.

Kareem Mojati, a Moroccan national and main deputy and general strategist of al-Ayeri agreed with his commander's assessment, but was overruled by bin Laden. Soon after, Mojati left Saudi Arabia with the belief that attacking prematurely was a huge miscalculation and would compromise the existence and establishment of future al-Qaeda cells. Moreover, he expressed grave doubts that the attacks would be successful, further hindering the recruitment efforts and eroding support for the organization.

The Cell Structure is Attacked and Weakened

Immediately following the May 12, 2003 attacks in Riyadh, the first cell was infiltrated. Saudi intelligence had received enough credible information to know who the leaders of the cells were, and from this, the government was able to draw up a list of senior operatives connected to al-Ayeri. Subsequently, al-Ghamdi surrendered, al-Dandani was killed, and the remaining members were scattered among nascent cells. The dispersion of members undermined the autonomy of the cells and they were forced to share resources. The loss of independence, however, made it easier for the government to infiltrate remaining cells since, when one member was captured, he could provide valuable information concerning the identities and activities of his confederates.

The leaders appointed after al-Ghamdi were unable to establish their own cells. In June 2003, al-Ayeri was killed at a roadblock in a shootout with Saudi security forces. On March 16, 2004 Khaled Ali Hajj was ambushed and killed by security forces in Riyadh on route to an undisclosed mission. He was succeeded by Abdulaziz al-Muqrin, the self-proclaimed leader of al-Qaeda operations in Saudi Arabia, until his death on June 18, 2004.

Once the top tier of the leadership was gone, less-practiced militants took charge, thus further compromising the cells. This development, in addition to increased Saudi security measures, led to a series of botched attacks, culminating in the November 2003 attack on the al-Muhayya residential compound that killed mainly Arabs and Muslims.

One of the major problems confronting al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia – its Achilles Heel – has been its weak recruitment effort. It expected a much larger cadre of able and willing young men to replenish the ranks as the Saudi government attacked and killed its members. This expectation proved to be a serious miscalculation since few quality candidates were willing to answer the call to jihad. Subsequently, al-Qaeda was forced to enlist the services of very young and inexperienced men.

As Yusef al-Ayeri and Mujati revealed, the organization felt that it did not have the time or the resources to do the important work of creating strong viable cells. By 2003, they were not prepared for the government's vigorous counter-strike, and both of these men expressed reservations about an early attack. The actual problem was that al-Qaeda had

been unable to justify its dogmatism and call for murder and suicide with religious arguments. This became especially problematic when it advocated attacking Saudis. It was only the battle-hardened legions from Afghanistan who were amenable to following bin Laden's instructions to attack Saudi security officers.

Organization and Patterns of Attacks

Al-Qaeda strategies have included suicide attacks, assassinations, bombings, hijackings and kidnappings. Furthermore, numerous reports indicate that bin Laden has an interest in acquiring or making chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. The organization has attacked American and other Western interests, as well as Muslim governments it considered to be corrupt or immoral, especially Saudi Arabia.³

As the chronology in Figure 2 shows, targets tend to be selected for their symbolic value and include embassies, military installations and public buildings in the United States and allied countries.

Figure 2 ***Chronology of Al Qaeda-Related Terrorist Attacks***

1995

- November 13: SANG HQ in Riyadh bombed. First of the new wave of terror attacks, and the start of the wind down of the US presence in KSA. 7 US killed: 1 military, 6 Civilians.

1996

- June 25: Bomb kills 19 U.S. soldiers, wounds nearly 400 people at US military housing complex in Al Khobar.

2003

- May 12: Suicide bombers attack housing compounds for foreign workers in Riyadh. Thirty-five are killed, including nine bombers, and 200 wounded. Al Hamra, Vinnell and Jedewahl compounds.
- June 14: Raid in Mecca kills five Islamic militants and two security agents.
- July 28: Raid on farm in Al Qassim kills 6 militants and two police.
- September 23: Raid in Jizan kills al Qaeda operative wanted by the FBI.
- November 3: Clash with terrorists in Mecca kills two and finds large weapons cache.
- November 8: Suicide bombers blow up Riyadh compound housing foreigners and Saudis, killing at least 18. Old B1 Boeing compound, now called Muhaya compound.

2004

- January 28: Gun battle in Riyadh kills 1 al Qaeda and 5 police.
- April 21: Suicide bomber kills 5, including 2 senior police officers in attack on government building in Riyadh. The al Haramain Brigades claim responsibility.
- May 1: Gunmen kill five Westerners in attack on oil office in Yanbu; four attackers and one policeman die. Some 50 people are injured.
- May 20: Police battle militants near Burada, killing 4.

³ "Al-Qaeda," www.globalsecurity.org

- May 22: Terrorists kill German ex-pat, Herman Dengel, head chef of Saudi Catering Company on a Riyadh street.
- May 29-30: Militants attack oil company and housing compounds in Khobar.
- Seven Saudi policemen and 22 civilians are killed. 50 hostages are taken.
- June 6: Simon Cumbers, an Irish cameraman working for the BBC, is shot dead in Riyadh.
- June 8: Gunmen kill American Robert Jacob, of Vinnell Corp., in Riyadh.
- June 12: American Kenneth Scroggs is shot dead in Riyadh. Al Qaeda claims responsibility.
- June 18: Kidnappers behead Lockheed Martin employee Paul M. Johnson Jr. in Riyadh
- August 3: An Irish civil engineer, Tony Christopher, is shot dead in Riyadh.
- August 30: Gunmen fire on US Consulate vehicle in Jeddah.
- September 15: Edward Muirhead-Smith, a British engineer, is killed in Riyadh in an attack claimed by Al Qaeda.
- September 26: Frenchman Laurent Barbot is shot dead in Jeddah.
- October 18: Top ranking militant Abdel Majed al Manaya is among 3 terrorists killed in Riyadh.
- November 4: Saudi Security forces arrest seven people, including a wanted terrorist suspect. The seven were apprehended during a raid on a cyber café in Buraida. Two security personnel were wounded in a shootout preceding the arrest.
- November 6: Twenty-six Saudi religious scholars sign and release an open letter calling on Iraqis to fight Americans and considering it jihad. Two days later the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar, released an official statement making it clear that the letter from these scholars represented neither the Government of Saudi Arabia nor the senior religious scholars of the country.
- November 9: In a predawn raid, Security forces kill one wanted terrorists and capture three others after a shootout in Jeddah. The daily Al-Riyadh quoted a witness as saying that Sultan Al-Otaibi, from Saudi Arabia's list of 26 most-wanted terrorists, was killed in the confrontation. A substantial arms cache was found in the house where the suspected terrorists were found. The cache include machine guns, hand-grenades and various types of ammunition. According to local press reports, the four-member group planned to attack a Jeddah compound coinciding with fireworks celebrations during Eid Al-Fitr. Additionally, Security forces arrest three suspects north of Riyadh on the highway to Qassim.
- November 11: The Interior Ministry announces that King Fahd ordered the release of those militants who surrendered to security authorities as a result of the June amnesty offer.
- November 12: Saudi security forces arrested five suspected terrorists in two operations in Riyadh and Zulfi. Three of the suspects were detained in Riyadh and two in Zulfi. Weapons and ammunition were reportedly seized in these operations. The next day an Interior Ministry spokesman stated that these individuals were not directly involved in violence, but were suspected of supporting extremist thought.
- November 13: The US Embassy releases Warden Message to remind of security concerns surrounding the death of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.
- November 17: A security officer is killed and eight officers wounded during a raid on a terrorist hideout in Qassim. Five suspects were arrested. Two of the suspects were wanted by authorities and linked to Al Qaeda. One reportedly belonged to the list of the 26 most wanted. He was not identified by name.

- November 27: Saudi security forces in Jeddah kill a terrorist suspect later identified as Essam Siddiq Mubarak. This man was linked to plotters of the al Mujaya housing compound attack last November in Riyadh. One additional suspect was arrested in conjunction with the killing of Mubarak. Additionally, police found a cache of arms in Mubarak's car.
- December 2: Saudi Security forces announce arrest of four suspected terrorists in various parts of the country. Two suspects were arrested in Artawiya. The two others were captured in vicinity of Hafr Al Baten and Buraidah.
- December 6: Militants storm the U.S. consulate in Jeddah, killing five US employees and three gunmen.
- December 29: Ministry of Interior and special forces recruitment office bombed; Bystander killed. Seven suspected Al Qaeda shot dead later in the evening.

Source: Adapted from work by Douglas Baldwin

As this chronology shows, many al-Qaeda-affiliated attacks on civilians were directed at destabilizing the Kingdom by targeting the 6 million foreign workers on whom the Saudi economy partially relies. They also were focused on Americans, in an effort to compound the tensions created by 9/11 and to split Saudi Arabia and the US. In many cases, however, Saudis were killed as well.

The coordinated car bombings on May 12, 2003 targeted Riyadh housing complexes and killed 34 Saudis and foreign Arabs. A November 8, 2003 car bombing killed at least 17. Al-Qaeda's ultimate target is the Saudi royal family. After the November 8 bombing Richard Armitage, US Deputy Secretary of State, stated that the terror network aimed "to bring down the Saudi government as well as to create fear and spread terror." Osama bin Laden has long called for the overthrow of the royal family in retaliation for the Saudi government's allowing the US to establish military bases in the Kingdom.

Saudi officials gleaned important information from the Saudi-based members of al-Qaeda during these attacks, particularly regarding their methods of operation in the Kingdom. Among other things, militants rented houses and cars using stolen IDs and disguised themselves as women or "hip" young men. Also, the money purportedly raised for Iraqi prisoners in U.S. custody actually went to fund terrorist operations.⁴

Confessions by captured militants also shed light on al-Qaeda operations within the Kingdom. According to Abdul Rahman al-Rashoud (cousin of Abdullah al-Rashoud, no. 24 on the most wanted list) and Khaled al-Farraj, approximately 95 percent of al-Qaeda operatives are "ignorant" and most do not observe basic Islamic teachings. They also stated that the organization recruited especially from the young. "Young ones are recruited because they do not have sufficient knowledge of the religion or a wise mind that can tell right from wrong," he said. Al Rashoud went on to say that al-Qaeda members spend a great deal of money and that most of it comes from "charitable donations." In some cases, members convince donors they are collecting money for poor Iraqi families.⁵

⁴ "Saudi Arabia Seeks to Portray Captured al-Qaeda Militants in Humiliating Light," Associated Press, September 10, 2004.

⁵ "Al-Qaeda Operatives are an Ignorant Lot, Say Former Members," Mahmoud Ahmad, *Arab News*, October 3, 2004.

Both these interrogations and the behavior of al-Qaeda indicate that the Saudi government response took time, but began to severely affect its capabilities after mid 2004. Al-Qaeda was forced to rely upon less organized surrogates to carry out, and ones that which were not directly under the control of bin Laden or any senior operative capable of sophisticated planning and execution.

One key example of such problems is that a housing complex al-Qaeda attacked on November 8, 2004, had once housed US nationals employed by the Boeing Company, but few Americans were living there at the time. The end result was to attacks Saudis and other foreigners, further adding to al-Qaeda's unpopularity. Riyadh attack also appeared to lack the planning and surveillance expertise that are the established hallmarks of a bin Laden-orchestrated attack.

Another example occurred on December 7, 2004 five militants attacked the US consulate in Jeddah, killing five consulate employees and injuring ten others. Security forces killed four of the militants. The new more stringent security measures implemented by the Saudi government seem to be working. Although the militants were able to breach the compound, no Americans were killed or seized in the raid, and the militant's car was unable to enter the compound. It appeared that the attackers did not have the same capabilities they had only 18 months ago since they fell short of their objectives in killing as many Americans as possible. All the militants were either killed or captured, and the attack was poorly orchestrated and executed.

On December 29, 2004, the Ministry of the Interior and a security recruiting center was attacked in a double suicide car bombing. The operation was less than a success since the vehicles were unable to get close enough to their intended targets and killed only the three suicide bombers.

According to Brig. Gen. Mansour al-Turki, the militants were forced to carry out the operation earlier than planned because a member was captured after a shootout in Riyadh a day earlier. "It is for sure that the terrorist operation was executed hastily," he said. "It seemed to be programmed to be executed at a different time and in a different fashion." Ten more militants were also killed in two shootouts on the same day—three right before the bombings and seven immediately afterwards. Among those killed was Sultan al-Otaibi and Bandar Abdel Rahman al-Dikeel both on the 26 most wanted list.⁶ Of the original 26 most wanted, only seven remain at large. In the past year alone, Saudi security forces have scored numerous impressive successes against al-Qaeda operations in the Kingdom.

None of these problems mean that Saudi Arabia is any sense secure against successful attacks in the future. While Saudi security is steadily improving in expertise, coordination, and training, Saudi Arabia is a relatively open society. It cannot protect every public building, area where foreigners go or live, or areas where ordinary Saudis can be attacked.

It is far from clear that the al-Qaeda organization in Saudi Arabia now has, or can pursue, a consistent strategy. Its efforts to strike at the Ministry of the Interior and security forces are further indications that it is under pressure. It is likely, however, that al-Qaeda is still

⁶ "Saudi Police Hunt Suspects in Attack," Abdullah al-Shihri, Associated Press, December 30, 2004.

providing the funding, training and encouragement for these operations.⁷ There also are substantial numbers of radicalized young Saudis in other countries, and more are still being recruited by various Islamist groups to go to Iraq, Chechnya, and other areas.

It is also clear from the tapes being circulated by bin Laden -- or in his name -- that Saudi Arabia remains a prime target. A tape that bin Laden seems to have circulated on December 17, 2004, shows how committed bin Laden remains to trying to overthrow the Saudi government by force.⁸ The tape was nearly an hour long and repeated many of Osama bin Laden's classic themes as well as expands the scope of his targets.

As in past tapes and messages, Bin Laden attacked the supposed financial and religious corruption, and pro-Americanism, of the Saudi royal family. "We are talking about apostasy and subservience to the infidels"... "As there is no difference between (U.S. Administrator Paul) Bremer, the former U.S. ruler in Baghdad, and (current Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad) Allawi in the implementation of America's policy ... So there is no difference between Bremer and the rest of the rulers of the region in implementing U.S. policy."

Bin Laden effectively called the Saudi royal family "infidels," and called on every Muslim to overthrow them by violent means, "How can (even) an insane person see an infidel ruler and his heavily armed soldiers and then claim that he wants reforms through peaceful means? This is completely false. This is meant to frustrate the efforts to establish justice."

Bin Laden called educational reform one of, "the most dangerous interferences in our affairs...crusader interference in changing curriculums...Recently there have been several efforts by the Saudi regime to change the curriculum in their schools, and U.S. officials have talked about education reform, especially of madrasas or Islamic schools in Pakistan, as an essential long term strategy for defeating terrorism...The objective is to erase the nation's character and Westernize its sons. (produce) educated slaves who are champions of America, (and will) sell the interests of the country.

He recommended striking at Saudi oil facilities because "Targeting America in Iraq in terms of economy and loss of life is a golden and unique opportunity...One of the most important reasons that our enemies control our land is the pilfering of our oil...prevent them from getting the oil and conduct your operations accordingly, particularly in Iraq and the Gulf."

Bin Laden's rhetoric, and the continuing strikes by al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, is a warning that the threat may take years to entirely eliminate, but the terror campaign since May 2003 does seem to have produced few new recruits and won little popular support. In fact, it has resulted in a backlash among the Saudi population, including many Saudi critical of the government. "People want government reforms and changes, but they are more scared of al-Qaeda extremists," said Mansour Nogaidan, a former Islamic militant and government critic. "The common people--those people who thought their life might

⁷ "Victims Provide Details on Saudi Attack," Faiza Saleh Ambah, Associated Press, December 7, 2004.

⁸ The following analysis of the bin Laden tape draws upon the work of Shaun Waterman, UPI Homeland and National Security Editor.

improve if the government changed—they are not ready to lose all this for what some teenagers have in their minds as a utopia.”⁹

While al-Qaeda still enjoys support from some quarters in Saudi Arabia and among some religious figures, the government campaign to sway Saudi public opinion away from Islamic extremism seems to be gaining momentum. Many Saudis now refer to the militants as “the grim reapers” and believe that they are bent on ruining the country. The family of one militant complicit in the US Consulate attack condemned the act and refused to accept condolences for his death. The family of another attacker, Fayez bin Awad al-Juhaini, refused to hold a wake for him, “as a sign of their rejection for the criminal act their son carried out.” The Kingdom’s most prominent religious figure, Grand Mufti Abdul-Aziz al Sheikh, called the attack a “great sin.”¹⁰

The Saudi Response

Saudi Arabia did begin to respond to the threat posed by bin Laden and Al Qaeda long before May 2003. In 1993-94 Saudi Arabia froze bin Laden’s assets. The Kingdom was one of the first countries to take such an action. On April 9, 1994, the government publicly revoked his citizenship. After the 1995 assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, to which bin Laden was linked, he was expelled from Sudan. In 1996 he returned to Afghanistan where the extremist Taliban had come to power. The November 1995 bombing of the Saudi National Guard Training Center in Riyadh that killed five Americans and resulted in the arrest and execution of four men was purportedly inspired by Osama bin Laden.

The events of September 11, 2001, brought a considerable increase in attention to Saudi Arabia. On that day, Saudi Arabia issued a statement characterizing the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as “regrettable and inhuman.” On September 20 Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal told Colin Powell and President Bush that the Kingdom wanted to be a part of the anti-terror coalition being formed, saying, “We will do everything in our capacity to fight the scourge of terrorism.”

A few weeks later, the government of Saudi Arabia signaled that it would allow US planes and troops stationed in that country to participate in military action against bin Laden during the war in Afghanistan by granting use of the Prince Sultan Command and Control in al-Kharj. On September 20 the Kingdom announced that it would sever diplomatic relations with the Taliban on the grounds that the Taliban government “continues to use lands to harbor, arm, and encourage those criminals [al-Qaeda] in carrying out terrorist atrocities which horrify those who believe in peace and the innocent and spread terror and destruction in the world.”

Internal Security Action

According to Saudi Arabia’s Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Prince Turki al-Faisal, the government has arrested and detained more than 600 individuals and questioned over 2,000 with suspected ties to terrorism since September 11, 2001. In addition, dozens of

⁹ “Al Qaeda Shifts Its Strategy in Saudi Arabia,” Craig Whitlock, *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2004.

¹⁰ “US Consulate Attackers Are Vilified,” www.news.scotsman.com

suspects have been extradited from other countries. Finally, as detailed above, the Kingdom has dismantled the major al-Qaeda cells operating in the Kingdom.

On April 26, 2004, in his address to the National Guard and security forces, Minister of Defense Prince Sultan warned terrorists to surrender for the sake of their own safety and security, saying, "Those who surrender will be safe and those who resist will lose." Prince Sultan went on to describe the terrorists as "a misled and brainwashed few working against their religion, their rulers and their people." Shortly after al-Muqrin was killed, Crown Prince Abdullah pledged offered an amnesty for those al-Qaeda supporters who had not directly taken part in the killing. At that same time, he gave the militants an ultimatum: "We tell this deviant group and others that if they do not return to the right path, they will meet the same fate (as Muqrin) or worse."

Both the events of September 11, 2001, and the May 12 and November 9, 2003 attacks in Riyadh reaffirmed the Kingdom's commitment to fighting the terrorist threat on all fronts, and that commitment has resulted in a great deal of cooperation between Saudi Arabia, the United States and other nations. Measures have been implemented to monitor and secure the financial infrastructure against illegal activities such as money laundering, and the government has taken aggressive steps to freeze the assets of individuals suspected of terrorist activity.

The Kingdom has also improved security measures at a range of locations throughout the country, such as public buildings and residential facilities. In May and December 2003 the government began to publish its counterterrorism initiatives, including a list of individuals most wanted by security forces for involvement in terrorist-related activities.

The most wanted list is shown in Figure 3, and predates the May 12, 2003 Riyadh bombings. The Saudi government demonstrated that it already had a good understanding of some key elements of the threat and of the individuals involved. At the time of its publication, the 26 most wanted list included the leaders of all five cells. Saudi security and intelligence officials not only knew who were al-Qaeda, they also accurately judged their relative importance in the al-Qaeda hierarchy. It is important to note that no individual who has claimed leadership in Saudi Arabia al-Qaeda has been outside this list.

In order to enhance the quality and performance of security and intelligence forces, King Fahd issued a Royal Decree calling for a 25% pay increase for these forces and all supporting units. More significantly, the Kingdom reorganized its security efforts to develop better training program and provide better equipment. It sought lessons from the experience of other countries, and began to improve the coordination of the security and police forces of the Ministry of the Interior, the National Guard, and the regular military forces. A new command authority was established to fight terrorism in the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry was given the task of coordinating the overall effort on an inter-service level.

Progress was necessarily slow, and several attacks revealed a lack of expertise, training, and coordination. While the Saudi response improved over time, it became clear to the Saudi government that it would take years to train and equipment the forces needed, recast the role of the military and National Guard, and strengthen key elements of the security services.

Fortunately, it became clear with time that al-Qaeda had very little luck in penetrating the military, National Guard, and security services, or even the ordinary police. Some recruitment was inevitable, but it occurred at so limited a level that most of the few cell members with any ties to the military or security services only had limited prior service and training and have only held minor positions.

The Political Dimension

Al Qaeda also could not create a popular base to challenge the government. Like other Muslims, the great majority of Saudis rejected the criminal acts perpetrated by extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda, regarding them as contrary to Islamic values. A poll published in November 2003, indicated that while most Saudis are suspicious of Western intentions in Islamic countries, few believe that the methods used by al-Qaeda are justifiable. As one interviewee commented, "When we hear bin Laden railing against the West, pointing out the humiliation of the Arab Peoples and the suffering of the Palestinians, it is like being transported to a dream...[but] when we see images of innocent people murdered for this ideology, it's as if we've entered a nightmare."¹¹

Crown Prince Abdullah consistently cautioned Saudi citizens against showing sympathy towards terrorists, saying that even silence can constitute support and pledging to stem the tide of terrorism: "I warn and caution ... everyone not to be silent, as silence means he is one of them... God willing, we are following them, and with God's help we will get them, no matter how long it takes, even if that means 20 or 30 years."

Saudi government and religious officials endorsed a message of tolerance and moderation, explaining that Islam and terrorism are incompatible. Crown Prince Abdullah, in speeches at the Organization of Islamic Conference Summit in Malaysia and Pakistan, underscored this position, recommending solid steps to combat extremism and improve relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Saudi Arabia repeatedly called for a global fight against terrorism and has urged an all-out war on terror. In a message to Hajj pilgrims in Mecca in February 2004 King Fahd stated:

The Kingdom's stance against terrorism is fundamental. It earlier urged the international community to confront the menace of terrorism, and has supported all peace-loving countries in their efforts to uproot terrorism. It calls on all peace-loving countries to adopt a comprehensive program within the framework of international legitimacy for combating terrorism so as to enhance the pillars of security and stability.

Saudi officials also deal with the difficult issue of purging and reforming radicals in the clergy. During the first half of 2004, the Kingdom fired 44 Friday preachers, 160 imams, and 149 muazzins (prayer callers) for "incompetence." Another 1,357 religious officials were put on suspension and ordered to undergo training. This total included 517 imams, 90 Friday preachers, and 750 muazzins.¹²

¹¹ "Independent Saudi Poll Reveals Major Changes in the Kingdom," Nawaf Obaid.

¹² Abdul Wahab Bashir, "Kingdom Has No Plans to Close Down Charities," *Arab News*, January 1, 2005, p. 2.

The Amnesty Program

In June 2004, the Saudi government implemented a controversial, one-time amnesty program aimed primarily at undercutting support for al-Qaeda. The one month amnesty, announced by King Fahd, was open only to those who had not been directly involved in carrying out terrorist attacks.

The objective of the program was to defuse the cycle of violence by offering individuals a chance to reflect on their course of action, renounce it, and return to the “Islamic fold.” Prince Nayef, insisting that the amnesty was a sign of the Kingdom’s strength said, “the (amnesty) granted by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd is a sign of strength. It was intended to tell these errant people to come to their senses and return to their parents, families and homes and to their religion.”¹³

This initiative not only had a profound psychological effect on the militants, but on Saudi society and the Muslim community at large. It took advantage of the fact that a family-driven society, in which family values and the extended family were critical, could be persuaded to put intense pressure on many of the young men that families know supported al Qaeda.

It also had a practical effect. Al-Qaeda had long accused the Saudi regime of being un-Islamic for cooperating with the U.S. and not fully implementing Shar’ia law. In the speech announcing the amnesty, King Fahd included a chapter from the Qur’an that highlighted the importance of the concept of forgiveness in Islam. By demonstrating that the Kingdom was governed by the law of God, the government reasserted its religious authority. This maneuver had the effect of undermining the legitimacy of al-Qaeda which has long used Islam to justify its actions.

The government also responded to al-Qaeda’s use of illegitimate fatwas to justify its views and behavior with legitimate fatwas. The Saudi Mufti-General issued a fatwa calling on “citizens and residents to inform about each and every one who plans or prepares for committing destructive actions so as to protect the people and the country.” This had the effect of depriving al-Qaeda of needed logistical support, making it more difficult to carry out operations.¹⁴

The program netted 31 militants who were later pardoned and released in November 2004 after authorities were assured that “the deviants [had] rectified their ideology and attitudes toward their nation and society.”¹⁵ In a related initiative, the Saudi government implemented a 2-month amnesty for the handover of unlicensed weapons without penalty. Those who did not comply by the August 29, 2004 deadline would be punished.¹⁶

Using the Media

The government also made more effective use of the media as a weapon in counterterrorism. On October 22, 2004, a Saudi newspaper published the confession of

¹³ “Amnesty is a Sign of Strength, says Naif,” Abdul Wahab Bashir, *Arab News*, June 28, 2004.

¹⁴ “Countering Terror with an Amnesty: Why it Makes Sense,” Bouchaib Silm, *The Straits Times*, September 15, 2004.

¹⁵ “Saudi Frees Suspects Who Surrendered Under Amnesty,” Reuters, November 11, 2004.

¹⁶ “2-Month Amnesty for Weapons Handover,” Abdul Wahab Bashir, *Arab News*, June 30, 2004.

an unidentified militant originally posted on an Internet website. Although he denied involvement in any bombings, he did admit that he was guilty of “incitement” to violence. The “repentant” member confessed he had ties to the al-Haramain Foundation and “had prior information about the bombing in al-Muhayyah neighborhood” in Riyadh. He also implicated Sa’d al-Faqih, the Saudi dissident leader of Movement For Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA), in the attempted assassination plot against a Saudi official.¹⁷

As part of the government’s campaign against militants who have carried out attacks against Westerners in the Kingdom, on December 4, 2004 Saudi national television aired interviews with the fathers of five militants denouncing their own sons for complicity in the terrorist attacks. The father of top al-Qaeda militant, Abdulaziz Issa Abdul-Mohsin al-Muqrin said he had wanted to take down his son himself. Ahmed Jamaan al-Zahrani, father of captured militant cleric, Faris al-Zahrani, who was number 12 on the most wanted list, contacted authorities when he knew his son was wanted saying, “he has a wife and children whom he should have been taking care of better than staying in Afghanistan.”¹⁸

On December 14, 2004, several jailed militants made a televised appeal from al-Hayer prison to al-Qaeda sympathizers in an effort to persuade them to surrender to authorities. Characterizing his jailers “like family,” and denying reports of torture and abuse, one seemingly repentant militant Abdulrahman al-Amari told the program that, “anyone who has experienced the reality finds a big difference between the many cases of torture we heard about and what we found. The dealings of the prison administration, the sympathy for the prisoners’ wishes...I can call it a family connection.”¹⁹ Another militant, who was on the list of the 26 most wanted, said that his jailers were nicer than his parents. This glowing picture of prison life, apparently given freely by those who participated, is another part of the government’s media campaign to further undermine support for al-Qaeda in the Kingdom.

Anti-Terrorism measures in the Financial Sector

The Saudi Government took deliberate measures to safeguard the financial system against unlawful activities long before September 11, 2001. In 1988 Saudi Arabia joined the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Trafficking of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances. In 1995 units were established at the Ministry of Interior, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) and commercial banking institutions to counter money-laundering activities. SAMA issued “Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Money-Laundering Activities” to Saudi banks to apply stringent “Know Your Customer” rules, to monitor records of dubious transactions, and to report them to law enforcement authorities and SAMA.

Saudi Arabia is a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FAFT) established by the G-7 in 1988, and has approved and completed two FAFT self-assessment questionnaires - one regarding FAFT recommendations on the prevention of money laundering (known as

¹⁷ “Saudi Paper Published “Confession” by Unidentified Militant,” BBC Monitoring Middle East, October 24, 2004.

¹⁸ “Fathers of Saudi Militants Appear on Television to Condemn Terror,” Rawya Regeh, Associated Press, December 5, 2004.

¹⁹ “Saudi militants Say Jailers “Like Family,” Dominic Evans, Reuters, December 15, 2004.

the FAFT 40 + 8 Recommendations) and the other regarding special recommendations on terrorist financing. SAMA exchanges information with other banking authorities and law enforcement agencies regarding money laundering and terrorist financing and has created a committee to undertake self-assessment for compliance with FAFT rules. The Kingdom invited FAFT to conduct a mutual evaluation in April 2003. It is also an active participant in international seminars, conferences, and symposia dedicated to combating terrorist activities globally.

In February 2003 SAMA began implementation of a program to train judges and investigators on legal matters involving terrorism financing and money laundering. The Saudi Government also began participating in international seminars, conferences, and symposia on combating terrorist activities

In August 2003 the Council of Ministers approved legislation to impose severe penalties for money laundering and terror financing. The new law requires maintenance of banking records, establishes intelligence units to investigate transactions, sets up international cooperation on money laundering issues with countries that have formal agreements with the Kingdom, and bans financial transactions with unidentified parties.

In July 2004, the Financial Task Force released its evaluation of Saudi Arabia's laws, regulations and systems combating money laundering and terrorist financing. According to this evaluation: "Saudi authorities have focused heavily on systems and measures to counter terrorism and the financing of terrorism. Specifically, they have taken action to increase the requirements for financial institutions on customer due diligence, established systems for tracing and freezing terrorist assets, and tightened the regulation and transparency of charitable organizations." It concluded that Saudi Arabia "meets almost all of the general obligations of the FATF 40 + 8 Recommendations."

Although the Saudi government willingness to cooperate has been encouraging, clearly more work lies ahead. According to a September 29, 2004 Senate Banking Commission report, Saudi Arabia has yet to fully implement its new laws and regulations, and opportunities for the "witting or unwitting" financing of terrorist activity still remains. In addition, there is little evidence that the Kingdom has taken any substantial retaliatory actions against organizations or individuals engaged in terror financing. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has yet to hold anyone personally accountable for terrorist funding and, in the process, de-legitimize these activities.²⁰

Monitoring Charitable Organizations

Saudi Arabia took a wide range of actions to ensure greater oversight of charitable organizations and safeguard against possible abuse and misuse of the system. In March 2002 Saudi Arabia froze the accounts of the Somalia and Bosnia branches of the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation.

Similarly, on December 22, 2003, the Saudi government took measures to designate the Bosnia-based Vazir and the Liechtenstein-based Hochburg AG as financiers of terrorism under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 (1999). The Vazir representative, Mr. Safet

²⁰ "Bi-partisan Panel Commends U.S. and Saudi Efforts to Disrupt Terrorist Financing, But Says More Progress is Needed," Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org

Durguti, was also designated a terrorism financier under the resolution. The Saudi government concluded that the two branches supported terrorist activities and organizations such as al-Qaeda and al- Itihaad al- Islamiya (AI) and others.

In May 2003, SAMA distributed an update specifically targeted at illegal banking activities related to charitable organizations, titled, "Rules Governing Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorist Financing." This update was issued to all banks and financial institutions in Saudi Arabia requiring implementation of new policies and procedures:

Consolidation of all bank accounts of charitable or welfare organizations into a single account for each organization.

- Identification required for all deposits.
- No ATM or credit cards can be issued for these accounts.
- No cash withdrawals.
- No overseas fund transfers.
- Accounts must be approved by SAMA.

Only two individuals authorized by the board of a charitable institution will be allowed to operate the primary account.

On January 22, 2004, a joint press conference was held in Washington D.C. to announce that Saudi Arabia and the United States had asked the UN sanctions Committee to designate the Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania and Indonesia branches of the al-Haramain Islamic Foundation as supporters of terrorism. On January 29 the UN complied with the request.

Then, on June 2, 2004, Saudi Arabia announced that it had dissolved the al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, five of its branches, and other private groups and established a new organization, the Saudi National Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad. This new entity is intended to be the sole means for private contributions raised in the Kingdom. It will operate with total transparency with accounting and audited statements issued every three months. Although the al-Haramian Foundation has been notified of the government's decision to close it, as of yet, no actions have officially been taken. The government had ordered the charity disbanded and its operations dissolved by October 15, 2004. Officials maintain that the foundation is "as good as closed" and no new donations were being accepted.²¹

Saudi Arabia took steps to freeze the assets of close Bin Laden associates. These included Wa'el Hamza Julaidan, who is believed to have been a financial conduit for al-Qaeda. Julaidan served as the Director General of the Rabita Trust, an NGO designated by President Bush's Executive Order 13224 as an organization that provided logistical and financial support for al-Qaeda.

²¹ "Saudi Charity Remains Open Despite Govt Orders to Close It," Associated Press, October 14, 2004; "Senate Banking Hearing Challenges Saudi Cooperation on Terror Financing," C&O Special Report, October 4, 2004.

During the month of Ramadan in 2004, the Saudi government stepped up monitoring of charitable organizations, fearing that some of the donations were being funneled to al-Qaeda and its affiliates. A strict ban on dropping cash into boxes at entrances of mosques and shopping centers was put in place along with the appointment of a committee of accountants to audit the financial statements of 299 registered charities.²²

As in most other areas of counterterrorism, there is still much to be done. Although the Kingdom has made significant progress towards impeding the ability of terrorist to use the financing mechanisms previously available to them, the systemic measures implemented will take time to yield results. Also, according to the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Saudi Arabia has not yet complied with the U.N. requirement to set up financial investigative units (FIU) to track charitable giving.

The Kingdom has not yet assigned personnel to the office to monitor the progress of tracking terrorist money. However, Juan Zarate, Assistant Secretary of Treasury of Terrorist Financing noted that Saudi Arabia had begun setting up an FIU, and commended the important steps the government had taken in conjunction with the U.S. to halt terrorist funding. He also noted that, the new restrictions on the financial activities of charitable organizations represented a “concrete step” by the government to deal with terrorist financing.²³

International Cooperation

Saudi Arabia occupies a major role in regional and international affairs through membership in various international organizations and it is using this role to help combat terrorism. The Kingdom cooperates with the United Nations, Interpol and others to combat terrorism and supports a host of international initiatives through its implementation of multilateral and bilateral agreements. Saudi Arabia is an active and regular participant in G-20 meetings and has signed a multilateral agreement under the auspices of the League of Arab States as well as a number of bilateral agreements and protocols with non-Arab countries. The government is also mindful of maintaining vigilance over the activities of those working at the institutions it funds. In a joint US-Saudi effort in January 2004 the diplomatic visas of 16 people affiliated with the Islamic Institute in Virginia were revoked.

The Saudi Government has combined its resources with the governments of the United States, the European Union, and Asian countries to devise a means for sharing information quickly and effectively. In 1996 the Kingdom established a joint Counterterrorism Committee with the United States to exchange information on Al-Qaeda. In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, the Committee was reinvigorated and the Kingdom redoubled its efforts to become a major partner in the war on terror.

On September 10, 2003, Prince Saud al-Faisal stated:

²² “Saudi Steps Up Charity Monitoring During Ramadan,” Diala Saadeh, Reuters, October 26, 2004.

²³ “Saudi Arabia Cited for Helpful Role in Combating Terrorist Financing,” C&O Special Report, October 4, 2004.

...Whatever justification [for terrorism] Saudis understood before, now they see they are at war with these terrorists. It is not true that the extremists are gaining the upper hand. We are fighting terrorists, pursuing them everywhere, closing the net on them. The government has arrested many of the ulema. The war, as the Crown Prince said, is a war against those who wage it, who encourage it, who support it, and even those who tacitly accept it. If there are in the pulpits of the mosques those who urge violence, they are removed immediately. In the schools, the books have been changed for the new school year. The instructions to the teachers have been changed. The [terrorist] money aspect is now completely controlled and the government knows it....

What the Saudi Government Did Not Do: The Findings of the 9/11 Commission

Despite allegations in the media and elsewhere that the Kingdom furnished material support to al-Qaeda, the independent and bipartisan 9/11 Commission formed to investigate the attacks of September 11 concluded that no such support existed. Specifically, the 9/11 Commission confirmed that there is no evidence that the government of Saudi Arabia funded al-Qaeda, nor any evidence that the 9/11 hijackers received funding from Saudi citizen Omar Al-Bayoumi, or from Princess Haifa Al-Faisal, wife of Ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar bin Sultan.

The commissioners wrote: "...we have found no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded [al-Qaeda]." Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal lauded the report, saying it had put to rest "false accusations" about Saudi Arabia's stand against terrorism. He continued:

The 9/11 Commission has put to rest the false accusations that have cast fear and doubt over Saudi Arabia. For too long Saudi Arabia stood morbidly accused of funding and supporting terrorism. In contrast to the insinuations of the infamous congressional report ... which aimed at perpetuating these myths instead of investigating them seriously, now there are clear findings by an independent commission that separate fact from fiction.

The Commission's report also denied that Saudi nationals were inappropriately allowed to leave the United States in the days following 9/11. According to the Commission, there was "no evidence that any flights of Saudi nationals, domestic or international, took place before the reopening of national airspace on the morning of September 13, 2001." It also affirmed "the FBI interviewed all persons of interest on these flights prior to their departures. They concluded that none of the passengers was connected to the 9/11 attacks and have since found no evidence to change that conclusion. Our own independent review of the Saudi nationals involved confirms that no one with known links to terrorism departed on these flights."

In December 2004 Prince Turki, the Saudi Ambassador to Britain, was awarded substantial libel damages and issued a public apology from Paris Match. The October 2003 issue of the French magazine ran an article that "pinned" the September 11 attacks directly on the Prince, and included an interview with Laurent Murawiec along with excerpts from his book, *La Guerre d'Après* which details the author's account of the dangers posed by Saudi Arabia to the U.S. Murawiec's described Prince Turki as having a close involvement with al-Qaeda and using it as his military organization-allegations that the Prince termed "outrageous." These views have been rejected by the U.S.

government and the 9/11 Commission. French authorities have also distanced themselves from the Murawiec controversy.²⁴

Although the 9/11 report clearly absolves Saudi Arabia from any direct connection to al-Qaeda financing and the September 11 attacks, the Commission does acknowledge that there was a failure by the government to properly supervise Islamic charities in the Kingdom. Consequently, some responsibility existed at the lower level. Radical clergy, employed by government charities, as well as prominent associates of the royal family, have been found culpable for providing encouragement, if not outright material assistance, for the terror campaign.

Al Qaeda's Situation in 2005

The al-Qaeda Organization in Saudi Arabia has done some damage to the Kingdom's economy and has killed many innocent people. It has scored a kind of victory in that it has forced the government to make massive expenditures on internal security, and has created a general climate of insecurity in the Kingdom.

This has had little impact on the day-to-day life of ordinary Saudis. It has, however, made many foreign workers leave, has forced foreign diplomats and businessmen to spend much of their time in secure compounds, and has reduced foreign investment. Almost inevitably, the end result has also fueled exaggerated fears about the Kingdom's internal instability. While the al-Qaeda attacks have brought Saudi and US officials together in cooperating in counterterrorism measures in the many areas, the resulting fears have helped to widen the distance between ordinary Saudis and Americans created by 9-11.

Nevertheless, al Qaeda has been ineffective in achieving its main goals for a number of reasons. First, it was unsuccessful in its recruitment efforts; second, it failed to articulate a viable alternative to the existing government; and third, it lacked funding and was forced to channel resources into the one existing cell—thus unable to establish other independent cells.

Despite the popular notion of al-Qaeda as a hydra that can constantly grow new heads, there are indications that the organization has not been able to recover from government attacks. At its peak, Saudi al-Qaeda claimed between 500-600 members scattered among the cells. Of these, roughly 250 were diehards. By the end of 2004, between 400-500 militants had been captured or killed, including all of the leaders--this is in addition to the thousands of sympathizers who were arrested and interrogated, most of whom have been freed.

Al-Qaeda underestimated the efficacy of Saudi intelligence and security forces, and their ability to adapt to new types of threat and attack. While ordinary police were not equipped to deal with new threat, Saudi intelligence was able to accurately identify those militants who comprised the original 26 most wanted list as leaders of al-Qaeda relatively quickly and the security services were able to hunt many down and disrupt most of the cells they headed.

Finally, in 2004 Saudi border guards detained nearly a million people attempting to gain illegal entry into the Kingdom and captured more than 10 tons of drugs (the sales of

²⁴ "Saudi Prince Gets Libel Damages," BBC News, December 6, 2004.

which are often used to fund terrorist operations). In addition, there were 2,000 weapons seizures and in all, nineteen thousand smuggling attempts were foiled and 8,000 smugglers arrested.²⁵

Most importantly, the organization could not win popular support. While it was able to exploit popular feeling and anger on some issues such as the Arab-Israeli issue, it could not win significant support for its actual activities from either Saudi people or the Saudi clergy. Above all, its emphasis on violence failed to resonate with the people. Saudis were shocked by the initial attacks, and those that targeted Muslims and Arabs further alienated and diminished support for the organization.

Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is at a critical juncture in its fight against terrorism. The threat is unlikely to disappear for years to come. Al Qaeda can draw on Saudis in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Central Asia, as well as other members of al-Qaeda who may be able to enter Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi and Yemeni borders present serious problems in terms of infiltration,

Saudi Arabia has hundreds of miles of porous border. In the last year, Saudi border guards have detained nearly a million people attempting to gain illegal entry into the Kingdom and seized more than 10 tons of drugs and 2,000 weapons. Some 30,000 men were detained in the Yemeni border area in July 2004 alone. In all, nineteen thousand smuggling attempts were foiled and 8,000 smugglers arrested.²⁶

The Yemeni border is particularly hard to secure. Much of it is in mountain areas or open desert that is very difficult to secure. Some tribes exist across the border and some towns straddle it without any barriers. Smuggling not only is a way of life, it is sometimes the key economic activity. Saudi security officers speculate that much of the more than 1.3 tons of explosives used in the attacks on the Ministry of the Interior in later December 2004 came from across the Yemeni border,

As has been touched upon earlier, the Iraq war has also posed new security challenges for Saudi Arabia, and while relatively few Saudi young men who have joined the Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq are not clearly tied to recruitment by Al Qaeda, most have been recruited by Islamist extremists.

.At a high-level security meeting in Tehran in December 2004, Iraqi Interior Minister, Fallah Hassan al-Naqib called on regional ministers and security chiefs to prevent infiltrators and money from flowing into Iraq. Commenting on the problem, Prince Nayef said "Iraq must not be a place for training terrorists, and they could be Saudis, like what happened in Afghanistan....the situation in Iraq endangers not only the country and its people, but has also become a clear and dangerous threat to security and stability in the region."²⁷

Although the government can point to significant strides in rooting out militant activity, the fact remains that over 90 people have been killed in terrorist incidents since May 2003, and al-Qaeda remains a threat both inside and outside Saudi Arabia.²⁸

²⁵ "Saudi Says Stops Nearly One Milo at Borders," Reuters, September 21, 2004.

²⁶ "Saudi Says Stops Nearly One Mln at Borders," Reuters, September 21, 2004.

²⁷ "Ways to Stop Iraq Infiltrators Sought," Ali Akbar Dareini, Associated Press, December 1, 2004.

²⁸ "Kroll Sees Terror, Political Risk In Saudi Rising," Reuters, September 22, 2004.

Dealing with the Underlying Causes of Support for al Qaeda

These trends are serious enough so that the government must address the underlying causes of unrest and of recruitment by extremist organizations. The government needs to demonstrate a broader commitment to expediting the reform efforts now in place, and move forward in new areas. Keeping violent opposition at bay requires a more open and representative Saudi political system, reductions in corruption and favoritism within the public sector, and less the concentration of wealth and power within the royal family and other leading families. This can be accomplished by increasing popular political participation. By giving Saudi citizens a more active voice and a stake in the system, allowing free association, strengthening political institutions and rooting out corruption.²⁹

Similar efforts are needed in economic reform, in diversifying the economy, in Saudization, in making education more relevant to job skills and employment, and in the overall effort to create jobs and careers for Saudi young men and women. Terrorism and instability never have a single or predictable set of causes. Ensuring internal stability requires a broad based effort to remove as many of the underlying causes of terrorism as possible, and the issues like education, employment, and career expectations draw more attention in Saudi public opinion polls and surveys than politics.

Similarly, human rights and the rule of law – including business law and property rights – affect far more people on a day-to-day basis than elections. Legitimacy is far more a matter of meeting these expectations, than rushing towards democracy without the proper institutions, experience, and development of moderate and stable political parties. This can present a serious problem when the Saudi government must also carry out effective and continuing counterterrorism operations and it is critical that the government find the right balance.

The best solution to terrorism and internal security is ultimately for the Saudi government to respond to the aspirations of its reform-minded citizens, which include many leading Saudi princes, officials, technocrats, and businessmen. Progress in a conservative and traditional society must be measured and evolutionary, and should be driven by Saudi reformers and not the priorities of outside nations and advocates. If, however, the government hesitates to make real, tangible progress in instituting reform, the Kingdom will lose a critical opportunity.

²⁹ “Saudi Arabia: Who are the Islamists,” International Crisis Group-ICG Report, September 21, 2004; “Saudi Arabia: A Balancing Act,” George Friedman, January 30, 2004, www.Stratfor.com

Figure 3
Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: The Most Wanted List

1 Ibrahim Al Rayyes	KILLED (Riyadh)	08/12/2003
2 Amer Al Shihri	KILLED (Riyadh)	23/12/2003
3 Mansour Fakeeh	SURRENDED (Najran)	30/12/2003
4 Khaled Al Hajj	KILLED (Riyadh)	16/03/2004
5 Rakan Sakhan	KILLED (Riyadh)	13/04/2004
6 Nasser Al Rashid	KILLED (Riyadh)	13/04/2004
7 Ahmad Al Fadhli	KILLED (Jeddah)	22/04/2004
8 Khaled Al Qurashi	KILLED (Jeddah)	22/04/2004
9 Mustapha Mubarak	KILLED (Jeddah)	22/04/2004
10 Talal Anbari	KILLED (Jeddah)	22/04/2004
11 Abdulaziz Al Muqrin	KILLED (Riyadh)	18/06/2004
12 Faisal Al Dakheel	KILLED (Riyadh)	18/06/2004
13 Othman Al Amri	SURRENDERED (Abha)	28/06/2004
14 Issa Al Aushan	KILLED (Riyadh)	20/07/2004
15 Fares Al Zahrani	CAPTURED (Abha)	05/08/2004
16 Abdulmajeed Al Moneih	KILLED (Riyadh)	12/10/2004
17 Hassan Al Hassaki	CAPTURED (Belgium)	26/10/2004
18 Sultan Al Otaibi	KILLED (Riyadh)	29/12/2004
19 Bandar Al Dakheel	KILLED (Riyadh)	29/12/2004
20 Abdullah Al Subaei	KILLED (Riyadh)	29/12/2004
21 Talib Al Talib	AT LARGE	
22 Saleh Al Aufi	AT LARGE	
23 Saud Al Otaibi	AT LARGE	
24 Abdulrahman Al Yazji	AT LARGE	
25 Abdallah Al Rushood	AT LARGE	
26 Kareem Al Majati	AT LARGE – (Fled Kingdom)	